

Flu Season Update: Flu Activity in Delaware Remains Low. Officials Continue to Recommend Flu Vaccination

DOVER – After the first full month of the 2018-2019 flu season, flu activity in Delaware remains low. There have been 42 laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza in the state since the season started on September 30. The largest number of cases, 20, have been reported in Kent County, comprising 47.6 percent of all cases. New Castle County is reporting 14 cases (33.3 percent), and Sussex County is reporting eight cases (19.0 percent). There have been 15 hospitalizations since the start of the flu season, including two children. Eighty-eight percent of lab-confirmed cases are influenza strain A. No flu-related deaths have been reported in Delaware at this time.

While activity is currently low, the Division of Public Health (DPH) continues to remind Delawareans to get their flu vaccine if they have not already done so.

“Even though this flu season is currently not predicted to be nearly as harsh as it was last year, you should not put off getting your flu vaccine,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “While the flu is unpredictable, what is predictable is that getting your annual flu vaccine can prevent you from getting the flu, and from spreading it to family, friends, neighbors and co-workers.”

The flu vaccine is recommended for Delawareans 6 months of age and older. Since it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies that protect against influenza virus infection to develop in the body, it is important to get vaccinated as early as possible to give your body time to build immunity. Getting the flu vaccine now will also provide protection

during the entire flu season.

During the 2017-2018 flu season, Delaware recorded 9,041 flu cases, (including the above) the highest number of laboratory-confirmed flu cases since record keeping began in 2005, and 35 flu-related deaths.

DPH offers opportunities to become vaccinated throughout the season, including at its public health clinics. A schedule can be found at <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/fluclinics.html>. Flu vaccines are also offered through physician offices, many pharmacies and some grocery stores. To locate where flu vaccines near you are being offered, Google "CDC flu finder" and enter a ZIP code. DPH provided 171 flu vaccines at its community clinic at the Porter State Service Center in October, and 1,100 at its drive thru flu clinic in front of DelDOT.

The flu is easy to transmit and you can get it even from seemingly healthy, but unvaccinated, children and adults. Vaccinations not only prevent people from getting the flu, but they can also reduce the severity of flu illness and prevent visits to the doctor, clinic, emergency room, along with hospitalizations and serious consequences (including death) from influenza. Vaccinated people have less chance of missing family, school and work events due to influenza illness.

In addition to getting an annual flu shot, Delawareans can prevent the spread of the flu and other respiratory illness with good hygiene: Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue, and dispose of tissues immediately. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow. Droplets from a sneeze can travel up to six feet. Also avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Keep your distance from people who are coughing or sneezing.

Flu symptoms come on suddenly, and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headaches and body aches, chills

and fatigue. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Those sick with the flu should stay home from work, school and other gatherings and not return until they have been free of fever – with temperature less than 100 degrees F (37.8 degrees C), without the use of fever-reducing medications for at least 24 hours.

They should avoid close contact with well people in the household and stay well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water and other clear liquids. Over-the-counter medicines can provide symptom relief but if you suspect you have influenza, call your doctor as they may decide to provide antiviral medications to help hasten recovery and prevent serious complications. This is particularly important for those who feel very sick, are pregnant or have chronic medical conditions.

For more information about the flu and where to get vaccinated, visit flu.delaware.gov or call 1-800-282-8672.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.